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DIRECTED RESEARCH

LUXURY TOURISM AND SUSTAINABILITY:

HOW ARE LUXURY CONSUMERS RELATING TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM?

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Abstract

This thesis presents a research on the relation between luxury consumers and sustainable tourism, and how they are approaching the topic. The issue of sustainability that is one of the most crucial problems faced by humanity, is managed by consumers in different ways. Overall, it is noticeable that consumers' awareness of the topic is increasing steeply, and luxury industries are embracing green movements as a priority. However, sustainable tourism is still poised between convictions and paradoxes.

The research outlines beliefs and concerns behind luxury clients' perceptions about sustainable tourism, providing interesting hints for marketing operators and hospitality entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Luxury Tourism, New Luxury Paradigm, Sustainable Luxury, Luxury Hotel, Green Hotel

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Chapter I – Contextual Background

The primary goal of this chapter is to give an overview of the theoretical background which is developing behind the concepts of sustainability and luxury. Therefore, to be able to contextualize further research, the author aims firstly to introduce the concept of sustainability and its main challenges in chapter 1.1. In paragraph 1.2 the main characteristics on which luxury relies are presented, with a specific focus on the intrinsic relationship between luxury and sustainability, which sees these two mutually supporting. In chapter 1.3, the author gives an overview of modern consumers who are generally considered conscious and future oriented. They prefer pursuing experiences over possession indeed. Thus, focusing on today's luxury clients, predominant changes in their behaviors will be shown.

1.1 Introduction to the concept of sustainable development

Different points of view about the definition of the term *sustainability* exist, however, by the end of the twentieth century, several perceptions had unified under the definition of the World Commission on Environment and Development: *“the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”* (Brundtland Report, 1987).

Nowadays, sustainability is one of the most crucial issues faced by humanity and this concept is becoming part of everyday life for the majority of people and industries. According to Bain & Company's survey (2018), on 297 global companies, 81% said sustainability is more important to their business today than it was five years ago, and 85% believe that it will be even more important in five years. For this reason, forward-thinking organizations are using innovation to produce appealing goods with interesting attributes such as price savings and customer service, introducing sustainability as a complementary object. (Davis-Peccoud J. et al, 2018).

Nowadays, the main challenge of sustainability lies in balancing the need of modern society to progress technologically and economically and the needs to preserve the environment, which includes the ecological integrity, the economic system, the social communities, and the long-term effects, to ensure equal opportunities of durability to future generations and to all other species co-habiting with humans.

1.2 Luxury and sustainability, an intrinsic relationship

During the 21st Century, a new conscious luxury market is growing. Therefore, sustainable consumption is feeding the mind of consumers more than ever and the demand for responsible practices and products is on the rise.

From the original point of view, luxury has often been associated with something unnecessary, not aimed to satisfy specific needs but merely to meet individual pleasures and social statements (Kapferer & Michaut-Denizeau, 2014).

On the contrary, sustainability gives the priority to community enhancement and the conservation of nature's resources, rather than encouraging excessive consumption (Kapferer, 2015). The two words next to each other sound paradoxical indeed.

However, according to the traditional definition, luxury relies also on traditional qualities as the finesse of craftsmanship, precious materials, and durability (Da Silveira, C., 2020). In fact, a key quality of a luxury brand is to sell products personally tailored by some experts who take a lot of years to acquire that specific knowledge and techniques. To make an example, the mark *Made in Italy* is famous around the world thanks to the work of qualified laborers who confer a high value to the products. In this way, luxury impacts the socio-cultural dimension, preserving the origins of a product and the local knowledge. Luxury also counts on the physical rarity of the offer and the scarcity of the constituents (Da Silveira, C., 2020). Therefore, the

conservation of these unique resources and the preservation of the environment are important goals for the majority of luxury industries.

Still, luxury can be associated with something durable, which hardly goes out of fashion and which pieces can be passed down through generations (Coste-Manière I., 2012). Their long-lasting life favors the reduction of waste and the protection of natural resources. (Kapferer, 2010 and De Barnier et al., 2012)

As we can notice, luxury and sustainability are theories just apparently discordant, but actually co-existing and even dependent. The assumptions at the base of luxury concept strictly rely on sustainable attitudes and, hence sustainability could find in the luxury approach a favorable solution.

In today's climate, luxury consumers are becoming increasingly aware of environmental concerns, thereby the new luxury paradigm is shifting from being about the "exclusive access to the products" to being about responsibility and authenticity (BCG, 2019). Environmental and human ethics pilot the new rules of the game: luxury brands should provide high efficiency and durable products, satisfying all potential renditions with zero-waste of raw materials and enhancing the community values (Adapted from Luxiders, 2020). Additionally, contemporary luxury consumers appreciate brands that value the worldview, the attention is not focused just on price anymore, they expect quality and authenticity. In some cases, even shifting their view towards the minimalism, where luxury achieve a central position. People prefer to consume a lesser quantity, but with higher quality; looking for a great fulfillment acquired through meaningful consumption or "artistic" experiences (Morace F. et al., 2012).

Redefining luxury in the era of sustainability means a big challenge for every business. Above all, luxury industry that are particularly vulnerable to reputational damage should be able to embrace the sustainability movement as a priority, since this conscious tendency is becoming an integral part of consumers' mindset (Kapferer, 2015).

1.3 The new paradigm of luxury client

To be able to contextualize the research the author is going to present further, it is important to show how clients are changing their attitudes towards luxury tourism and hospitality.

The attention may be focused to:

- An increasing consideration to the quality: new luxury clients prefer brands that reflect new capabilities, tailored experiences, and extraordinary high-touch hospitality. They pretend to be listened, impressed, and delighted by the properties over the expectations. Accordingly, luxury hotels should understand, remember, and predict client's preferences involving both people and technology (Reichheld A. et al., 2018).
- A gradual shift towards an omnichannel experience. The use of mobile apps is largely widespread among luxury consumers, who have the access to a wide range of information whenever they desire (Barton et al., 2016). As a consequence, to remain competitive, luxury hotel brands should be responsive and forward-thinking in their digital approach. They should increase the knowledge of their guests by forming a partnership to benefit from larger customer data, creating a *touchable* brand through content marketing's activities, encourage users to share contents, and smartly improve their reservation process, especially for mobile devices (Reichheld A. et al., 2018).

Furthermore, social media usage is on the rise too. Luxury travelers consider social media interactions as an integral part of their experience indeed. Today, the *instagrammability* of the destination strongly affects the choice: a recent study reveals that two-fifth of Millennials are used to choose locations based on how appealing they are on Instagram (Joyce K., 2018).

- An ever-growing inclination toward experiential luxury. By 2022, the experiential portion is foreseen to count for roughly two-thirds of the whole luxury market, symbolizing a crucial changing in consumer approach, from owning to being (BCG,

2019). The tendency at the core of experiential luxury travel reminds to authentic, exclusive and enriching experiences, which could involve both expensive stays at five-stars hotels and dinners at Michelin-starred restaurant, but also crowdsourcing trips and cheap taxi services like Uber. This means more contact with locals, being curious about the insights behind-the-scenes of local brands to feel part of a real process instead of being a mere result. The new luxury clients aim to *live like locals*, they pretend to humanize the experience, sharing on social media anecdotes of authentic adventures, being meaningful interactions with natives, or historical beliefs (Chopra, 2017). Experiential luxury is the achievement of the substance with style.

- A strong preference for personalized experiences. Modern luxury consumers pretend flexibility for shaping their journey. From the hotels side, concerning the experience off-property, it is necessary to grant interactive itineraries planning systems, allowing clients to tailor unique outdoor activities. In terms of facilities on-property, they should engage guests with personalized tools and opportunities, to help them to become more independent. The goal should be to discover how brands can best personalize experiences and make the customization process easier (Reichheld A. et al., 2018).
- A natural inclination towards sustainability, that sees green solutions becoming a decisional factor when it comes to the luxury sphere. The combination of sustainability and luxury is actually so much taking a real shape into consumers' minds that even luxury tourists are committing to be more responsible when they are out of the country of residence (Chopra, 2018). These new clients support authentic experiences, local cultures, and historical traditions. Still, they seek unique adventures and wildlife, gladly paying a premium price for natural beauty and preserved environment rather than favoring degrading lands and touristic attractions. Modern luxury tourists aim to minimize their negative impact, without abandoning aesthetic and elegance.

Chapter II – The Research

2.1 Research question

The following paragraphs intend to present the findings of 20-in-depth interviews and to introduce the research question that has been at the foundation of the analysis: *How are luxury consumers relating to sustainable tourism?*

To address this question, the following topics, where the main concepts – luxury, sustainability, and tourism – are examined in relation one to each other, will be analyzed:

- A. How luxury consumers perceive the concept of sustainability**
- B. The behaviors of luxury consumers towards sustainable tourism**
- C. The paradox: which aspects of sustainable hospitality are luxury clients most concerned about?**

To sum up, findings show that a positive attitude towards sustainable tourism is increasing rapidly in the behaviors of luxury consumers. However, even the most conscious ones claimed to have crucial doubts for what concern “green” hotels, highlighting the need for communicative improvements between luxury clients and hospitality brands.

2.2 Methodology

This chapter presents a comprehensive framework of the procedures that have been adopted to answer the suggested research question. It justifies the decision of the methodology, the modality and the sample selection.

Considering the scope of the study, a qualitative approach in the form of individual in-depth interviews was used to be more appropriate.

One-to-one interviews were performed in order to conduct an extensive probing of each respondent. Thereby, it was possible to uncover underlying feelings, as well as values, beliefs, and attitudes (Malhotra.N.K., 2010:136). Given the limited number of interviews that have

been conducted, this methodology resulted particularly important for the investigation: it allowed the researcher to explore different aspects of the argument, giving to the study an interpretative nature. Therefore, any interpretation resulted from a specific analysis of the participants' understanding of sustainability and luxury tourism topics.

2.2.1 Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews

In-depths interviews are an unstructured and direct approach to obtain information, always conducted one-on-one basis. These personal interviews are especially relevant to explore the meaning behind people's behaviors and how they develop the research phenomenon (Mason, 2002, p. 63).

In this specific case, the interviews have been conducted by phone for two main reasons: firstly, due to Coronavirus restrictions, which recommend people to have less contact as possible, and secondly because respondents were actually located in different regions of the world.

Before starting, the permission of recording the interviews and to use them for academic purposes was asked to the participants.

According to traditional telephone interviews, the method involved calling each respondent, asking him/her a series of questions, activating hand-free calls, and recording the interviews with a PC recorder. Each interview lasted around 40 minutes on average and was transcribed in order.

Interviews followed a semi structured approach. This approach required an initial general question such as "Tell me about your last vacation", then the author encouraged the respondent to talk freely about his/her sensations towards the experience. After asking the preliminary question, generally, the interviewer applies an unstructured template (Malhotra. N.K., 2010:153). Pursuing this methodology, the interviewer followed a rough outline draft, based

on a structured guideline, influenced by the subject's replies. The guideline contained a series of open-ended questions which were asked from the broadest to the most specific.

To go even more in detail inside the mindset of respondents, the end of the interview has been conducted following two different projective techniques, which is an indirect form of questioning that encourages respondents to project their underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes, or feelings regarding the issues of concern (Malhotra. N.K., 2010:158). The first one used is known as Word Association, in which the interviewee is proposed with a list of words one by one, and it is demanded to provide the first word that comes to mind sequentially. The second projective technique applied, is named Third Person Technique, in which the interviewee is presented with a visual or verbal context and required to refer the feeling, opinion and attitudes of a third person to the circumstance.

2.2.2 Sample description

The sample included 20 participants: 12 Italians, 1 Portuguese, 1 Polish, 2 British, 1 French, 1 Bosnian, and 2 Monegasque. All of them are luxury consumers since they buy luxury products with a frequency of at least once a year. Moreover, they have a positive attitude towards travelling since they are used to travel for leisure with a frequency of at least twice a year.

Anonymity has been promised to all respondents of this research. However, to provide some information and to demonstrate the heterogeneity of the participants, Appendix 1 concerns a table including specifics about gender, age, nationality, education, and occupancy.

In general, respondents were both male (7) and female (13), with an age between 23 and 65 years old, all European, including 14 graduated and 6 with a diploma, 9 workers, 7 students, and 4 households. A diversified sample has been used to test whether or not one of these traits could depict variations in attitude and behaviors towards sustainability.

The initial sample was selected purposively, namely with a specific target subgroup in mind.

More specifically, the interviewees needed to respect some prerequisites. Among them, being between 18 and 65 years old, this because, in Europe, people under 18 years old have not a legal age to be responsible for themselves, and people over 65 might not have a positive attitude towards traveling anymore. Also, being European, so that respondents have similar culture and values, to ensure the most accurate possible analysis of the sample. They needed to have a positive attitude toward travels, so traveling at least once a year and being luxury consumers, therefore buying luxury goods with a frequency of at least once a year. Finally, they needed to have heard about sustainability recently, namely in the past six months.

To prevent sampling bias, a second method was used to recruit the other half of the respondents. Therefore, the interviewer asked 10 respondents to find another person, who met the requirements above, available for the interviews. In this technique, called Snowball sampling, the following respondents are picked based on the referrals or information provided by the initial interviewees (Malhotra. N.K., 2010:349). These people should have demographics and psychographic traits similar to the person who named them; this method is usually helpful for selecting participants with rare characteristics.

Giving the high subjectivity of the perceptions and beliefs consumers have regarding luxury sector, the heterogeneity of participants was essential to gain interesting and insightful results.

2.3 Addressing the topic

With the scope of addressing the research question - *how luxury consumers are relating to sustainable tourism* – three main concepts have been analyzed, as follow:

A. How luxury consumers perceive the concept of sustainability

To understand deeply the actual behaviors and attitudes of luxury consumers towards sustainable tourism, it is important to figure out the underlying beliefs and perceptions luxury

consumers have about sustainability. To develop the topic, the researcher asked interviewees to describe their idea of sustainability and explain how they perceive it. These two questions left the respondents free of describing the matter in the way they prefer, contextualizing sustainability in any circumstances. 18 out of 20 respondents connected the concept of sustainability to something positive, sometimes even fundamental. On the contrary, 2 out of 20, considered sustainability as an argument far away from themselves, complicated, and difficult to apply to their lifestyle. Here, three main personas emerged, demonstrating how sustainability is differently manifested in consumers' behaviors:

The Practitioners. These luxury consumers, which were in total 8 out of 20, considered sustainability strictly necessary. For them, sustainability must represent a high priority goal for luxury industries, which should be the ambassadors to convey the message of a correct lifestyle.

One of the participants highlighted this perception by stating:

Nowadays, during the modern time we are living in, it is fundamental to be conscious of what is happening on our planet. I think that luxury industry has the potential to shape consumers' behaviors and attitudes, so it should use this power to make a change and be at the forefront of a change for the better. (Practitioners, Polish, 24 years old)

Practitioners thought about sustainable luxury as the future of high living, finding a positive correlation between their luxury lifestyle and a sustainable mindset. They perceived green products to be high quality, technologically improved, and durable, often relating the topic to expensive architecture and innovative design. One of the respondents put it the following way:

I think the new luxury lifestyle will be sustainable living. For instance, I know a lot of friends of mine that have houses with sustainable architecture and design. My parents are trying to do the same. Sustainability is becoming more and more important and it should be applied everywhere. And also, greenhouses seem so technological and innovative! (Practitioners, Monegasque, 26 years old)

Sustainability and luxury are seen as complementary since Practitioners perceived sustainable products to have high standards and a large extent of opportunities to develop further.

The Shallows. In total they were 10 out of 20 - the large majority of the sample – and hence Shallows’ approach grabbed the attention of the interviewer.

Generally speaking, Shallows thought about sustainability as a positive value to support. However, this commitment tent to decrease when it comes to luxury. Sustainability did not affect consumption behaviors of luxury goods: they perceived the concepts as mutually exclusive, creating an attitude-behavior gap. A participant justified it:

For instance, I pay attention to recycling anywhere because for me it is important to take care of the environment, but for luxury shopping it’s different. When I’m going to spend a lot of money on an expensive vacation, for instance, I want to be sure that the hotel will be the one I prefer the most. During this phase, I don’t want to deprive myself of some options because of environmental issues. (Shallows, Italian, 24 years old)

The belief that the desirability and aesthetic of the product should above all affect luxury purchases, was not the only aspect that was feeding the gap. A general lack of trust in the system was crucially affecting the attitude of Shallows.

I’m not sure to what extent sustainability is a real problem in our society. Despite it, I’m trying to act sustainably. [...]I think luxury companies are using sustainability as a marketing strategy just to enhance their image and reputation. Unfortunately, I believe it is a trend of the moment, just that. (Shallows, Italian, 54 years old)

As it can be read, some participants stated they were not sure whether they might trust luxury goods are as sustainable as claimed. The quotes demonstrate that a generally positive attitude toward sustainability exists, but exceptions are made when it comes to the luxury sphere.

The Unbelievers. These kinds of consumers, who represented 2 people out of 20, were simply indifferent to the argument. They did not consider sustainability in their everyday life at all. One of them explained the concept as follows:

I’m 57 years old, I’m too old to pay attention to these problems. I don’t see any implications in my current life, and I don’t think it is a crucial problem at the moment. [...] The argument is very complicated and even the experts don’t know precisely what it will cause in the future. (Unbelievers, British, 57 years old)

Generally, their negative attitude came from a deep lack of knowledge, mainly due to a crucial lack of interest. Unbelievers did not consider sustainability a real issue and, accordingly, they did not like receiving updates about this matter. They looked at themselves as relatively aged persons, meaning they considered environmental problems as something just young people should pay attention to. In a few words, they can be considered cynical.

However, the Unbelievers represented a very small percentage of the sample; therefore, they were not representative of any interesting phenomenon.

B. The behaviors of luxury consumers towards sustainable tourism

This research has proven that three different characters come up when the relation between luxury and sustainability is explored. As result, even if for the large majority it was not considered a purchase decision factor when it comes to luxury items, 90% of the respondents demonstrated a generally positive attitude towards sustainability.

According to findings, both Practitioners and Shallows confirmed they consider sustainability as an important value to not forget when they travel too. One participant argued:

I want to leave a place as I found it the first time. I always try to respect the environment, culture, and people. I think it's important to respect the place where other people live in the same way we preserve ours. (Shallows, Italians, 55 years old).

What it can be noticed is that luxury consumers interviewed during the research can be considered overall aware. As previously was shown, the interest in the topic and sensitivity for environmental issues lead these categories of consumers to act consciously and rationally in different contexts. During the investigation it was asked the participants to show how they live sustainability when traveling and two of them replied as follow:

Before a trip, I can't forget to bring with me my water bottle. It is to avoid the waste of plastic! It's a simple but smart act. (Shallow, Italian, 23 years old)

and still...

I always try to book flights from companies that promise fewer gas emissions. I believe sustainability practices must be valued in every context. For this reason, even when I travel, I'm used to taking it into account. (Practitioners, British, 27 years old)

Despite this rational attitude typical of Practitioners and Shallow, a spontaneous attitude towards sustainability common to Unbelievers too, was revealed.

Results uncovered attitudes and behaviors towards luxury tourism and showed that the vast majority preferred authentic experiences like having dinner at local restaurants, doing long walking instead of taking the taxi, and opting for locals' recommendations over touristic attractions, for instance. Findings confirmed the theory according to which nowadays the majority of luxury tourists are greatly interested in more real experiences, essentially because the authenticity symbolizes a new chic and high status (Kapfere and Michaut-Denizeau, 2014). What was curious is that while they were telling about these preferences, any of them were concerning about sustainability. They justified their choices by saying that the aforementioned experiences are the most preferred because they are more exclusive and unique.

Analyzing the situation carefully, it was easy to understand that the behaviors of luxury tourists are becoming unconsciously sustainable.

To sum up, the new luxury tourism approach, which is embraced by the majority of modern luxury consumers according to experts, is leading luxury tourists to adopt practices more and more sustainable in a spontaneous way.

C. The paradox: which aspects of sustainable hospitality are luxury clients most concerned about?

Until now, the research outlined three types of consumers who exhibited three different attitudes towards sustainability. Practitioners and Shallows agree on the importance to adopt environmentally friendly behaviors anywhere they might be. The most evident distinction was that for Practitioners the commitment to sustainability goes beyond their mere personal

preferences: they consider sustainable development to be a requirement to enjoy a safe future. On the other hand, Shallows seem to be a step backward. They are still elaborating on the concept in order to decide how they want to approach it. For the moment, theirs is not a full-time commitment and individual pleasure is likely to predominate.

Another category was depicted, the Unbelievers. They represented the minority of the sample and, in a few words, they did not consider sustainability at all.

However, it has been realized that all categories are developing a spontaneous tendency to act sustainably when they travel because the new luxury paradigm influence well-off tourists to prefer more authentic experiences rather than touristic facilities and attractions.

Going on to the third topic, the research analyzes deeply luxury consumers' perceptions of sustainable tourism, focusing mainly on luxury hospitality.

Firstly, what is interesting to notice is that the large majority of participants described the choice of the hotel as one of the most important things to plan before a trip. From their point of view, luxury accommodations should never disappoint the expectation, they in fact must respect high standards of quality in terms of aesthetics, customized services, and facilities.

To justify this, one participant argued:

The hotel is one of the most important elements of a trip. The research for the best one takes me a lot of time because I want to be sure they will cuddle me with the best services I can ever desire. (Shallows, French, 55 years old)

According to this quote, from the association technique used during the interviews, the most common words which came to respondents' mind to the question "Tell me the firsts three words that come into your mind when I tell you *Luxury Tourism*", were *exclusive hotel*, *sophisticated* and *services*.

In general, findings show a strong necessity of high standards for every element of a trip.

Regarding the hotels, meeting these standards is strictly required for being part of the options during the consideration phase.

After examining the most common expectations of respondents towards luxury hospitality, the researcher investigates the implication of sustainability within the context.

As expected, the respondents classified as Shallows and Unbelievers admitted they have never considered to book a sustainable hotel in their life, each of them because of their characteristic mindsets. A Shallow justified it:

I have never thought to book a sustainable hotel until now. I had never even heard about them so far. If I would leave tomorrow, I don't think I would book one of them. Maybe if someone whom I trust would recommend it... (French, Shallow, 55 years old)

As the research has already shown, for Shallows the issue of sustainability is something they are curious about and they are willing to respect it when it concerns simple actions during everyday life. However, when the focus is shifted on the luxury sphere, sustainability is never considered as a factor of influence.

According to the statements above, Shallows and Unbelievers reacted exactly as supposed: for this reason, regarding the third topic, the attention of the researcher focused principally on the behaviors of Practitioners.

Surprisingly, inside the cluster of Practitioners, only a small percentage – 2 out of 8 respondents – booked green hotels at least once, while the large majority has never reserved them.

Investigating deeply, what emerged is that the majority of Practitioners, who is used to consider sustainability as a valuable purchasing factor normally, have several concerns about green hotels. Here, the paradox turned out, as a participant puts it:

I've always desired to stay in a luxury sustainable hotel, but the point is that I don't know actually if the price is worth it. To what extent are they impact-saver? Someone claiming to be sustainable, but they don't display any information, any results... I'm discouraged to book them. (Italians, Practitioners, 28 years old)

The quote revealed the first cause of concerns: a lack of trust in the hospitality brands.

Another interviewee confirms the fact, saying “I guess that, if a luxury guest asked for a non-sustainable service, a green luxury hotel would provide it anyway”. This concept, which was shared by many, comes from the idea whereby luxury hotels firstly should satisfy every clients’ desires. This reflects the belief that ‘eco-rules’ cannot be imposed on luxury hospitality. Some participants argued that sustainability is something luxury clients experience individually in a different way and in general it seems impossible to organize a luxury hotel with a unique green-solution appreciated by everyone.

Moving on, a second prominent cause of the paradox was found among the answers. 4 out of 8 Practitioners stated that they would expect more information, which should be communicated by properties when they decide to implement sustainable initiatives. The scarcity of information generates a problem of trust and makes luxury consumers believe they are throwing their money away; it also leads people to question important aspects concerning the luxury experience. A respondent argued:

I’m used to supporting green practices but for luxury hospitality is different. In contrast to luxury fashion and food companies, which are very transparent, luxury hospitality is not. I’m afraid that the quality and the aesthetic could not represent what I’m pursuing. Implementing these practices, will the guests’ experience suffer?
(Monegasque, Practitioners, 26 years old)

In essence, this reveals that this lack of knowledge, apparently caused by the brands themselves, increments negative thinking. It simultaneously confirms that participants are afraid of suffering from the implementation of green practices and they are not willing to pay a premium price for a discreet experience.

Analyzing into details which aspects of the experience they were most concerned about, three main dimensions, which they would like to receive more information about, before booking the stay, came out:

1. *The cleaning of the room.* 6 out of 8 Practitioners admitted being very worried about the general cleaning of the room. They mentioned some services as the changing of towels and sheets, which, in their view, should not be subjected to variations unless clients do not specifically ask for this sustainable solution. In their opinion, cleaning is one of the most important aspects of a luxury stay and clients should not suffer from a lack of cleanliness.
2. *The food services.* 4 out of 8 Practitioners affirmed being aware of the quality of the food and above all for the breakfast service. These clients explained that breakfast service is a crucial factor during the hotel selection. They love abundant breakfasts where they can choose among several dishes without any limitations. For this reason, these clients are worried that breakfast service can be subjected to some restriction to reduce waste. Some of them also mentioned vegan food, which they don't appreciate, making them afraid it could be imposed to clients.
3. *The taxi services.* 2 out of 8 Practitioners said they would be very upset if the hotel did not provide a taxi service to clients to avoid gas emission. Even though they usually prefer walking instead of taking the taxi normally, they admitted liking to have this service available for free in any moment they prefer.

Concerning luxury hospitality, it is clear that clients are not ready yet to trust the system blindly, pretending more transparency by the brands: they need to be aware of any restrictions and limitations imposed by green rules.

Still, another problem was expressed:

More than once I tried to search for sustainable hotels, but they seem so few!! I want to choose the best among them, not feeling forced to book that one because it's the only one. (Monegasque, Practitioners, 28 years old)

As it can be read, the third theme that emerged was the scarcity of green hotels. The fact that luxury clients interested in sustainable hospitality feel forced to choose among just a few options goes against their ideology. Another Practitioner echoed the same sentiment: “I have always been used to choose. Why now should I feel obligated?”.

To conclude, the unexpected behaviors of the Practitioners created a curious paradox. These consumers, who are used to greatly support green practices and, in contrast to Shallows, they have a deep knowledge on this matter, feel frustrated towards luxury sustainable hospitality. Essentially, almost the totality of the Practitioners confessed to be very upset about not being able to book sustainable hotels. In fact, at one hand, just a few green hotels exist, and luxury clients don't like to be forced to choose. On the other hand, they strongly believe that brands not properly engaging the audience enough, discouraging them to try.

The paradox proves that even the most confident Practitioner demonstrates a dubious attitude for what concerns luxury sustainable hospitality: apparently, they are not ready yet to trust the system, at the risk of losing some luxury benefits. They pretend the storytelling of the project, to be engaged in the decision-making process, and, above all, they want hospitality brands to convince them that sustainability is an added value to their luxury experience, as other industries have already done.

Chapter III – Implications and Discussions

3.1 Discussion of research's insights

This thesis aimed to demonstrate how the respondents - who were all luxury consumers - are approaching sustainable tourism. Analyzing the behaviors of 20 people, three different consumer categories were depicted: The Practitioners, Shallows, and Unbelievers.

What is easy to notice is that a generally positive attitude towards sustainability and sustainable tourism is increasing in consumers' behaviors. This happens due to the new luxury paradigm which leads luxury consumers to be more aware, now more than ever, of environmental issues. Indeed, the majority of them are conscious that responsible luxury will be the future of high-living. However, the matter still creates doubts and paradoxes among consumers.

According to the research, it becomes evident that a huge paradox is raised by the Practitioners. These kinds of consumers stated to strongly support green practices even considering sustainability as a valuable purchasing factor in the decision-making process of shopping luxury items. Nevertheless, the vast majority of Practitioners does not apply the same eco-green ethics when it comes to luxury hospitality.

From the insights, the aforementioned paradox could be perceived on two distinct levels. Firstly, it exists a *pragmatic level*, that considers the belief according to which a real luxury hotel should cuddle its guests satisfying every request and any exceptions can be made for unsustainable claims. Furthermore, it also regards the scarce availability of green hotels which would force the decision of luxury clients. Here, the two concepts – luxury tourism and sustainability – find it hard to co-exist.

Secondly, there is an *emotional level*, that regards the individuals' concerns about luxury sustainable properties. Participants are worried that the luxury experience could be compromised due to the implementation of sustainable practices. The fear that the experience

could not be what they are pursuing often dominates, leading very conscious clients to opt for non-sustainable hotels. Nevertheless, they admitted being frustrated to not be able to find an impressive sustainable property. Here, in the mind of clients, luxury tourism and sustainability should set a common goal to co-exist and support each other. Thus, what it can be imply from the conversations is that they hope to be able to stay in luxury sustainable hotels in a very near future.

Concluding, it becomes obvious that the attitude towards luxury sustainable tourism is increasing positively in the minds of luxury consumers, even leading some consumers to be profoundly conscious about environmental and social problems. However, it can be observed that luxury hospitality seems to be perceived as a step backward compared to other industries, in terms of spreading sustainable values. Therefore, Practitioners feel to be taken for granted by hotels' brands which, in their view, are not committing to convince luxury clients that sustainable solution is the added value to their experience.

A general lack of trust, the scarcity of the information and the fact that green hotels are so few make sustainable hospitality not as much desirable as generally they are used to pretend from luxury experiences.

3.2 Limitations

Before moving forward to relevant literature, it is necessary to concentrate on some technical limitations. As a matter of fact, few methodological difficulties have been met throughout the data collection phase.

In most cases, the interview has been done by phone, both because a great majority of the respondents were located in different countries, and because of the Covid-19 specific restrictions. Since the purpose of the research was to discover beliefs and behaviors of

interviewees, the communication tool resulted in being slightly limiting. In fact, subject's gestures and expressions, needed to catch left unsaid sensations, are significant to analyze the physical context during in-depth interviews. Covid-19 situation not only influenced the communication method but also represented a factor that biased the propensity of respondents to talk about their way of living and traveling, since this critical moment has changed daily lives.

Furthermore, some of the respondents have been reached through the snowball method, and, in some cases, the interviewees picked people who did not meet requirements: the necessity of the intervention from the interviewer was fundamental.

Still, some of respondents were students from NOVA School of Business and Economics, the same university as the interviewer. They already knew the general scope of the thesis; therefore, they could be somewhat influenced when answering.

By contrast, to the research positively benefitted from the responses of some people who have never done in-depth semi-structured interviews before. During the interviews, they often lose the main purpose of questions and greatly prolonged the length of the conversation: this permitted the author to collect insights about their perspective that could unlikely have come up otherwise. Even though, conclusions were drawn from the investigation of a quantitatively small sample and, consequently, not statistically representative of the entire population. However, the investigation has been carried out on individuals with different nationalities and backgrounds, designed to gain effective stimulus for further analysis.

3.3 Future research

The present project might bring food for discussions to marketing specialists, especially in their constants monitoring of consumers' needs. The project outlined how luxury consumers are living the new trend of sustainability and both motivations and concerns at the base of luxury

consumers' sustainable behaviors when travelling. What has been identified is not only the superficial level of their attitudes, i.e., the proof that acting consciously is important for them in any situation, but it also deeply investigates to figure out concerns and doubts about luxury sustainable tourism that are still rooted in consumers' minds.

Given the purpose of the research, the author suggests three more investigations that may be conducted in the future:

1. It would be interesting for marketing operators to explore thoroughly the psychological aspects of people who feed the paradox. Investigating deeper their habits, past experiences, and personal relationships, it may be possible to discover the most influencing factors which shape their way of acting and thinking. It would be significant to find out which are the best channels to drive a communicative improvement and the most suitable contents that are effectively able to lead conversion. From the proposed research, luxury hotel brands could benefit from those highlights to experiment with new languages and communication strategies. Furthermore, they might also use the study to optimize the steps of a marketing plan, trying to invest their money in the most valuable way possible.
2. To give the research a broader meaning, it would be useful to include respondents from other markets inside the interview phase. For instance, Chinese luxury consumers, which are currently part of a real booming economy and count for a huge share of the whole European tourism, could be an interesting sample. This would enrich with the common traits they have with European luxury consumers and the dissimilarities in terms of perceptions and values. Therefore, discovering psychological aspects and socio-demographic characteristics of different consumers might be relevant to engage them with different marketing approaches.

3. This research paid attention only to consumers' perceptions, without incorporating the point of view of hospitality entrepreneurs. Future research could base on these findings to build a new study, where stakeholder's opinions and beliefs are investigated. Here, it would be curious to deepen the required changes in management and how important would be the investment that properties need to make when they decide to implement sustainable solutions. Additionally, understanding what hospitality players think about the sustainability movement, whether at this moment they aim to embrace it as a priority, whether they want to become a pioneer or whether they don't consider it an opportunity and prefer to stay with their current business model. Learning more about entrepreneurs' considerations and evaluations would give the context a broader meaning.

In conclusion, from the marketing impact viewpoint, what has been done with this research and what may be done in the future, may offer to hospitality players an interesting outline of luxury clients' sensations and significant hints for building an effective marketing strategy during the implementation of sustainable solutions. In this climate, the establishment of a new marketing model and the implementation of an innovative operational management may represent a successful strategy to fully enhance the concept of "sustainable luxury tourism", to be intended either as a luxury unique experience or a reasonable way of acting.

However, as the third suggested research proposes, this study could also be taken as a starting point to develop further studies where the business side of the context might be analyzed to cover the reasons behinds the current situation.

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